



How do red light photo enforcement cameras work? A camera is connected to the traffic signal and to sensors at the intersection stop line that monitor traffic flow. The camera is triggered by any vehicle entering the intersection above a preset minimum speed and following a “grace period” of time after the signal has turned red. Virginia legislation states this specified grace period of time must be at least 0.5 seconds. Depending on the particular technology in use at the intersection, a series of photographs and/or video images show the red light violator before entering the intersection on a red signal, as well as the vehicle’s progression through the intersection. Cameras record information such as the date, time, time elapsed since the beginning of the red signal, and vehicle speed. The photographic evidence is reviewed by trained law enforcement. Generally, tickets are sent by mail to owners of violating vehicles.

How will I know which intersections have red light cameras? Legislation enacted by the 2007 and 2012 General Assembly requires localities to place conspicuous signs within 500 feet of the intersection where a red light running camera is installed. Localities also are required to conduct a public awareness program advising the public of the photo enforcement system that is being implemented.

Doesn’t placing signs at the approach to intersections with red light cameras defeat the purpose of installing the cameras? No. The purpose of the red light camera program is to improve intersection safety by reducing the number of red light violations. If the warning signs stop motorists from running red lights rather than the cameras themselves, then the purpose of the program is being met.

Do cameras photograph every vehicle passing through an intersection? No. Cameras are set so that only those vehicles that enter the intersection after the light has turned red are photographed. Vehicles entering the intersection on yellow and still in the intersection when the light turns red are not photographed.

Isn’t the main purpose of red light cameras to make money? No. The objective of the photo enforcement program is to improve intersection safety. Signs and publicity campaigns required by the 2007 and 2012 General Assembly warn motorists that photo enforcement is in use. Revenue is generated by fines paid by drivers who continue to run red lights. Independent audits of red light camera enforcement across the country have found that these programs generally do not generate excess revenue. Camera equipment costs vary based on the type of camera, the complexity of the intersection, and technical requirements. A red light camera system with installation costs more than \$100,000. Fines for red light violations in Virginia are limited to \$50 per violation by the legislation.

Wouldn’t increasing the length of the yellow signal at an intersection decrease the occurrence of red light running? Allowing adequate yellow timing can reduce red light running, but longer yellow time alone does not eliminate the need or potential benefits of red light cameras. Yellow times at signals are determined based on variables such as the posted speed limit, typical deceleration rates of vehicles, the grade of the road (uphill or downhill), and the amount of time it takes a driver to see the yellow signal and react (perception-reaction time). Yellow times are generally in the range of three to six seconds. Increasing the perception-reaction time from 1.0 to 1.5 seconds has shown to reduce the number of red light violations.

Who chooses the intersections for photo enforcement? According to revised 2012 legislation enacted

by the Virginia General Assembly, localities interested in photo enforcement, within their right of way, must conduct an engineering safety analysis for each candidate intersection. Localities desiring photo enforcement at intersections within VDOT's right of way must conduct an engineering safety analysis conforming to the department's safety analysis template and submit it to VDOT for approval. Final approval for intersections located within VDOT's right of way will come from the appropriate district administrator or their designee.